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ABSTRACT

This paper presents a counseling model based on transactional analysis (TA) to be used with staff members whose professional performance is considered marginal. The introduction of the paper suggests reasons for marginal performance. Counseling from the TA viewpoint is described as a series of transactions designed to improve performance, solve a personal or job-related problem, and create a path for individual development. Two stages to counseling situations based on TA techniques are explained. A first internal review of ego states and their effects by the manager is recommended as a preparation for counseling. Guidelines for this review are given which concentrate on strengthening the adult aspect of the client. A set of 10 TA guidelines for the actual counseling, designed to assist in developing exchanges which will solve the problem and encourage client growth and development, are listed and explained. The paper concludes by recommending follow-up evaluations once counseling has been terminated as a control measure to determine whether goals are practical and whether the action being taken will assure their attainment. (NRB)

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MARGINAL PERFORMANCE - A TA MODEL OF COUNSELLING AND APPRAISING

Introduction

There are many possible reasons why the professional performance of a member of staff may be considered to be "marginal" and requiring improvement:

+ Inadequate training, induction, and supervision
+ A mis-match of the individual's skills and interests with the job
+ Imprecise job descriptions and conflicting roles
+ Inter-personal difficulties
+ Personal problems
+ Perceptions and expectations which do not realistically relate to the job, the institution's objectives, or the organisational climate
+ Incompetence.

Whatever the reasons, there comes a time when the manager has to intervene and confront the issue squarely.

Two approaches, conflict resolution and the problem-solving counselling interview, have been dealt with elsewhere (Marsh 1979; 1982). This Information Bank Paper is designed to outline a third possible approach using techniques of Transactional Analysis as its model, and to supplement existing Papers dealing with Inter-personal Skills (Turner, 1978) and managing marginal performance (Curtis 1982 a, b, c). It is based on the assumption of some knowledge of TA (Turner 1978, Berne 1975).

Counselling from the TA viewpoint is a series of transactions designed to:

+ Improve performance
+ Solve a personal or job-related problem
+ Create a path for individual growth and development.

The power of TA is that it deals with the entire range of human behaviour in a homogenous, consistent, and understandable way, and leads to understanding the self and others by emphasising how people relate to one another. These relationships can be modified to mutual advantage if there is sufficient sensitivity. The counselling interview is thus used to solicit and exchange information, thoughts, and feelings bearing on the problem situation. During the interview the manager has to deal with his own Parent, Adult, and Child as well as those ego states of the member of staff. The aim is to create appropriate complementary, Game-free transactions involving and committing the constructive Adult in both parties. The authority relationship may, however, pose difficulties for counselling transactions, in, for example, the consistent danger of the superior's dominating, intimidating Parent (Critical or/

or Nurturing) becoming inextricably hooked into the subordinate's Child (usually Adapted). On the other hand, the superior's over-Adult orientation may produce a sterile interchange because of his seemingly personal unconcern and aloofness. Transactions may thus become crossed, ulterior, or "angular" and either party may become involved in Games playing out roles of Victim, Persecutor, or Rescuer.

There are broadly two stages to any counselling situation which is based on TA techniques: a necessary first internal review of ego states and their effects by the manager before the counselling, and the counselling itself. TA provides helpful guidelines for both these stages.

Before the Counselling

The preparation for counselling involves strengthening the Adult by an internal review:

(a) Examining any Parent or Child programming (or scripts) from which anxiety or prejudice might arise to interfere with the process.

(b) Checking out specifically any recurrent Games and Rackets to prevent a slide into I'm Only Trying to Help You, NIGYSOB, Blemish, Stupid, Yes But, Wooden Leg, et al., and exploring the danger of collecting and giving Trading Stamps (especially blue, brown, red, and white).

(c) Checking out the subordinate's Life Position and any typical response patterns which may be blocked to prevent a Game or used to change an ego state.

With a primed Adult it is then possible to:

(a) Define the objectives of counselling, state the measures of success in achieving acceptable changes in behaviour, and plan how to help the subordinate to become his own Rescuer, responsible for his own thoughts, feelings, and actions operating in an Adult ego state.

(b) Check out the appropriate records, documents, and files applying to the problem situation.

Counselling

TA techniques offer a set of guidelines to assist developing a creative series of exchanges which will not only solve the problem but also open up ways for growth and development.

1. Effective change can only be initiated by the other.

Whilst it is impossible to change the content of ego states it is possible to help the other to become aware of their content and elicit Adult responses in mediating thinking and behaviour.

2./

2. Hold the Parent and Child in check while Responding.

(a) Avoid closed Parent-Child transactions.

(b) Avoid Adapted Child responses which usually result from admonishing.

(c) Avoid discounting, negative and crooked strokes, and put-downs.

3. Help the other to satisfy his Parent.

Establishing standards of work sufficiency helps those whose Parent hounds them on to endless activity or with unachievable standards of perfection.

4. Use the Child to empathise.

Use Child (and Adult) to convey a sense of understanding the other's feelings and perspectives.

5. Enlist the other's Adult.

Careful questions can prompt a recognition of unrealistic wishes, aspirations, values, expectations, and fantasies, leading to awareness and commitment.

6. Listen to messages from the Child.

"I can't", "I should", "I try but", signal their origins in the Child, revealing self-image, hopes, fears, doubts, and an isolation from the Adult.

7. Hook the Little Professor.

Find ways of offering tasks and responsibilities which allow expressions of creativity. This will also counter the evasive strategies of the manipulative Child trying to get its own way.

8. Stroke for being as well as doing.

This fulfils the need to be recognised as a person and not just for what is done in task-related transactions and activities.

9. Keep transactions straight.

Avoid discounting by crooked strokes. When reprimanding separate the person from the act. Concentrate on the behaviour and not the personality or presumed attitudes (i.e. use the Adult instead of the Parent). It also disarms the Child response of a perceived threat to self esteem.

10. Do not supply pay-offs.

Games can be stopped by not offering the expected pay-off. Only offer gold trading stamps. Call on the other's Adult to map out a satisfactory plan for change.

Successful/

Successful counselling concerning performance occurs when both the manager and the subordinate leave with a common understanding of their responsibilities and a genuine commitment to follow through. To assure this, there is obviously a need to conduct follow-up evaluations as a control measure to determine whether goals are practical and whether the action being taken will assure their attainment.

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